V. First Reactions to Material Inferiority

556 441 The access of the Fang to the traditional trade regions has had great consequences. What started out as a conquering and "colonizing" undertaking has imperceptibly changed into a search for manufactured "riches" (bium) and [157] competition for trade routes and trade centers. The quest for "merchandise" is the primary male activity and sets in motion the machinery of war and witchcraft.

829 773 The legends which we know stress the attraction of the West as the country of white men who have all riches at their disposal. One of these told by V. Largeau suggests the importance of access to these trade zones:

"We arrive at last at the N'Tem and the Ogooué where we meet those who distribute riches ... they give us everything, we become rich." (1)

1. Op. cit., article: Instruction.

The legendary texts collected by Father Trilles under the title "Noirs et Blancs [The Blacks and the Whites]" are particularly significant. A predominant place is given to the theme of wealth, held only by the white men. Wealth has escaped the black men — because of a lack of technique and because of an attitude of abandoning rather than dominating the world, (2) or

2. "Proverbes, Légendes et Contes Fang [Fang Proverbs, Legends, and Tales]," op. cit., and especially "Noirs et Blancs [Blacks and Whites]" and "Légende du Nsas [Legend of the Nsas]."

has been stolen from them. (3) The whites apparently represent

3. "Legend of Bingo"; and "in order to seize his treasures (from the hero

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Bingo) and possess his secret, they killed him and took the green stone, the green stone he would have left us. Since then men from beyond the mountains possess the riches of the earth, but we have kept the laws of Bingo...."

wealth, they are mitâgõ, those who count. They have even been proclaimed by mythology. They have the physical appearance of ghosts, and they have at their disposal all the goods accumulated in the country of the ancestors. One can see therefore the powerful impression made by the arrival of the white man who was rich in merchandise, and the value, reinforced by the whole meaning of the myth, placed on this wealth. At the time of the clan regrouping movement, certain teachings in the form of question and answer continued to associate the two terms, power of the white man's example and pursuit of riches:

"--What life should we lead?
--We should lead the European life.
--What is the example we should give to lead the European life?
--We should work in order to earn money...." (4)

4. Cahier des réunions [Notebook of Gatherings], Yémisèm of Oyem.

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At the beginning of this chapter we stressed the attraction of the economically strong centers -- the coast, the Lower Ogooué, Spanish Guinea. A map of the migrations makes [158] them appear like meeting points. At first the Fang settled in the outskirts of these centers or attracted the trading stations to themselves with a feeling of real appropriation. Du Chaillu and Cureau observed this phenomenon, the former by showing how "having become the white man of such-and-such a chief, " he "obtained well-being and security" but was obliged to give

441 presents." (1) The latter analyzed the Ogooué commerce which was

1. Voyages et Aventures dans l'Afrique Equatoriale [Travels and Adventures in Equatorial Africa], pp. 106 and 120.

"under the thumb of the Fang population": "Firms were obliged to maintain their establishments in definite localities and were forbidden under threat of hostilities to move them upstream. The European agent was respected; far from being disturbed, their stores were strictly protected by the village warriors. The merchant was a prisoner of the population; he found himself invested with a monopoly." (2)

2. Op. cit., pp. 294-295.

441 556 829 The first government reports continue to note, like Du Chaillu, the desire of each large grouping to have a trading post for itself; once satisfied they would relax and be submissive."(3)

3. Rapport annuel de 1907 [Annual Report of 1907], Archives of Gabon.

This behavior is not explained by the single economic anxiety to reserve for themselves a monopoly and to have at hand the possibility of bartering. To have a trading station in contact with the village itself is to have reached the end of migrations westward which were to lead to the source of wealth; it is to participate constantly in this wealth and to have the certainty of a superior life. To enter into relations with the white man, who appears both as an "eldest son" and more than a human being with his riches and knowledge of riches, this is to participate in a circuit of power and fecundity, and to transcend a somehow cursed existence in order to attain the "true life."

829 773 On the other hand, the legends show how, in contact with technical manifestations and European enterprise, the Fang very

to Pahouin women, but it is certainly a geographical characteristic of the southern Cameroons, consequently, the textiles for sale are to a great extent those sold in Europe. Specifically African prints, such as "wax-prints," are dying out. Underclothes, stockings, and shoes reflect the sophistication that goes with wealth. The purchase of durable goods that go under the heading "Equipment," (bicycles, phonographs, pressure lamps) is another symptom, as is the changing demand for household articles. /35/ While the saucepan is still the basic kitchen utensil, enamelware is in strong competition with crockery and glass. Blankets are used everywhere, but the use of sheets is also on the increase.

A mere list of commodities shows the present-day importance of trade. The native populations have not always realized this, owing to their lack of inclination for it. They have not started businesses and have often left this to immigrants, coastal people long familiar with European ways, particularly the Bamiléké or "Haoussa," /Hausa/ who for their part have a solid trading tradition and great capacities in this field. The Boulou especially despise trade and refuse to have anything to do with it. Other Pahouin peoples are not so strongly antipathetic, but their business activity remains very limited.

Is it this bankruptcy on the part of the indigenous people and this taking over by "foreigners" which explains the organization and the location of trade in the region? The villages are in fact very badly served; markets are few and far between and so are rural shops. Perhaps we ought to note differences between the various Pahouin and Pahouinized groups. While a village trader is always most uncommon in Boulou country in spite of the relative affluence of the planters, he is not unknown in Ewondo districts and is quite often to be met with among the Eton, where resources are, nevertheless, more limited. Without local trade the collecting of crops and specifically of cacao posed quite a problem, to which the coming of buyers brought a solution. Business houses advance money to the buyers and buy what they are able to bring back. From hut to hut along the trails buyers negotiate purchases with planters. With these "purchases by peddling" it might seem logical for sales by peddling to develop. Yet this phenomenon is quite recent, being tied up with the development of transportation by car and bicycle. But while the buyers are generally native to the region, the pedlars are nearly always foreign.

As house-to-house buying creates countless disadvantages, the administration has endeavored to create rural markets so that the public

nature of the transactions and competition would correct them. These markets represent an attempt at introducing trade into the rural milieu, and they are not restricted to the purchase of cacao and palm trees; some African traders try to sell textiles, hardware, and food products. But the markets are still too new for the custom to have become firmly established, for them to have an existence of their own. It may be that here too we should except certain Eton cantons, where there seem to be some genuinely native rural markets.

Although of European origin, the markets held each day in the main towns of the subdivisions have become entirely a part of the way of life. Originally they were set up to provide food supplies for the settlements that grew up around administrative posts /36/ or missions. Then, professional traders came to offer imported merchandise to villagers come to sell their garden produce. Nowadays these markets are routine affairs, drawing their clientèle from a radius of 20 kilometers. Their importance depends upon that of the particular subdivision. As an illustration, we may use the following figures from a study of the market at Sangmélima: 200 women come to sell vegetables, maize, or fruit grown in their gardens. Some women dealers in palm oil, after having bought it liter by liter in the bush, come here with from 10 to 20 liters to sell. Young boys sell cigarettes, pieces of sugar, sandwiches, or cups of coffee, while women bring fritters. Side by side with these petty tradesmen others transact business on a larger scale: about 20 sell dried, smoked fish prepared on the coast or stockfish (dried and salted) imported from Europe, while in their stalls 20 "market boys" /sic/ offering textiles, enamelware, or hardware wait for customers.

The number of craftsmen grouped around the market, the number of cars, lorry-buses /camions amenages/, or bicycles which have brought customers show clearly that this is not an artificial institution. The market is now tending to become one of the elements of the town.

It shares this role with the shops. European and African traders do business along Western lines, both wholesale and retail at the same time. They try to keep on good business terms with the African small dealers who know very well how to go from supplier to supplier to compare merchandise, price, and terms. At the same time they sell directly to the public. Such shops are uncommon outside towns — in this connection as with markets, the villages are little touched by economic activity.

631 Given Pahouin interest in a political system based on election, which
636 pretty well corresponds both with their individualism and with their
[181] mistrust of individuals, it may be that such a system has some chance of success if it is allowed to become Pahounized.

5. Associations

575 Traditional associations were undoubtedly less developed among the Pahouin than among other African societies with more closely knit or more stable hierarchical structures. The social groups at the core of clans or villages arose and decayed in accordance with migrations and "swarmings-off." They showed a kinship rather than an associational character.

Nevertheless, there existed within kinship as well as outside it associations not based on descent, voluntary and not de facto /discretionary?/. These were often characterized by initiations and had a magical or religious basis, with varying purposes.

The minsamba, "societies," were temporary, organized for a military operation (ôban, mvêle) or for a trade journey to the coast or to the "trading-posts" of the Ogooué. The men who took part often came from different villages or even from different clans bound by an alliance (élat). They swore an oath of loyalty and mutual assistance, involving a ritual sacrifice followed by a communion
[782] meal; for a war enterprise, there might be a human victim, especially if it were a matter of avenging the death, kum mbim, of a monyañ (brother) and if there were a prisoner of war available to sacrifice. The association was dissolved once its end had been accomplished, but a bond persisted between its members.

[204] Similar temporary associations could be formed for large elephant
[141] hunts; they were moreover often confused with the nsamba dulu or nsamba ayak (traveling society, trade society) afterward organized for the sale of the ivory.

575 The most important permanent associations were those among the
783 initiates of different rites. But what was most often involved in these was a kind of relationship by way of a rite, which was not the rite's real purpose, or was so only adventitiously. When, for instance, all the inhabitants of a village took part in the ésye purification rite, a strengthening of the fraternal ties among them certainly ensued, but the prime purpose was purification (1). /63/

yet takes the risk of a breach of faith on the ñyale's part. The latter is supposed to return the flock intact, but as long as he tends it, he may do what he wants with it, putting it to use like a kind of credit. It is as well to point out that this kind of contract, which at present is falling into disuse, gave occasion to endless litigation.

The trade contract under its old name abom or the newer atiñ kilak or atiñ akus kaka is, on the other hand, becoming more and more widespread. A trader, nkuan biôm or mbi fatyélé, advances to a kilak (from "clerk") cash and goods on the kilak's undertaking to provide the equivalent in a certain tonnage of cacao. The contract is set forth in a written "good for...," which represents recognition of the debt. The kilak exerts himself to collect the promised tonnage, usually by buying from planters of his clan, sometimes by subcontract with "small clerks," bone bekilak. The contract has a due date, with the usual contingencies; in the case of rising prices, the kilak may run into difficulties and not be able to furnish the promised tonnage unless planters of his family give him credit or sell to him below the price. Cacao buying is also done by commission, the agent, nlôman, (envoy), receiving a cash advance with which to buy as much cacao as possible. Both methods give rise to litigation, which is all the more common because the moneylender is usually a European or an African of another tribe, a "Gabonese" in French Equatorial Africa, a Bamiléké, mone galifis (from Coast English "Grassfield") in the Cameroons.

In general a commission is always possible, whether in making a contract or in pleading in court. The person giving the commission is called mve ngul, giver of power; the agent is called mbili ngul, possessing power. They are jointly and severally responsible.

The bilaba contract, described about (41, 77), is disappearing. There survives, however, a sort of poor man's bilaba, the meyeñ, from nneñ, guest, which allows a zesé môt, a humble man, to levy a kind of tax on the rich, minkukum, of his clan by the simple procedure of going to visit them, carrying a present /81/ which must be returned by generous hospitality and by a countergift of higher value. This is a quasi contract, sanctioned by public opinion, which is a heavy burden on people thought to be rich; it underlies the family parasitism prevalent in large towns. The reputed nkukum who tries to escape would be accused of being hard hearted, nlem ayet, which could easily lead to a charge of sorcery.